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THE LEE STATUE

Remarks of

S. S. BURDETT

A comrad["] of the Grand Army of the Republic

BEFORE THE MIDDLESEX CLUB

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

MARCH 24, 1910

(Veterans' Night)

MR. PRESIDENT AND COMRADES:

Near half a century has passed since eleven of the States of the Union pronounced the death sentence upon it and summoned the executioner to do the evil deed they had resolved upon.

I am looking into the faces of some of those to whom the loyal people gave armed commission to stay the executioner's hand—the fast falling remnant of those who may proudly say: “Of all this I was and saw.”

The stake in that race where death was king and life a jest, you know.

The upturned faces on the battlefields were dewy with youth; on them shone the early light. It is evening now for their surviving comrades, and for all of them. It is evening now for the survivors of those magnificent armies we overthrew, who together with us made the American name forever immortal in arms. In place of the red flame of battle



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we are sharers together in the beams of benediction which the setting sun casts over the vanishing day.

The glories gleaned on the battlefields, well nigh equally divided where massed columns met, have been matched by the tireless, all-conquering energies of the disbanded hosts shown in every walk of civil life during the intervening years.

Alabama's furnace fires send their challenge to those of Pennsylvania, and the sound of the shuttle, drowning the music of the streams beside which they speed, in half the States of the South bids New England beware for her supremacy.

It is the one, the United Country, which has turned the gaze of the whole world upon us and set the feet of the nations tramping to our shores.

This does not call in question the truth of Garfield's saying that in the struggle for the Union "We were right, everlastingly right, and that our foes were wrong, eternally wrong;" nor does it mean that their hearts must cease to throb with pride over victories won; with affection for those who led them gallantly to the end, with sorrow over homes made desolate, over fallen comrades whose epitaph must read "for a lost cause," and over ideals forever vanished. This is a human world. Men come and go and are forgotten; but there are sparks of the divine which in just a little measure ennoble men and nations, and do not die with them. Affection and gratitude outlive the decayed body, within which once dwelled the spirit which awoke them to life. Nor in this regard does it matter that in the final arbitrament the cause which stirred them into being is by victory and history condemned. *They who cast their lives into the balances in defense of a cause they champion need no other assurance of the sincerity of their purposes.*

The Congress of the United States, by act duly passed, has invited the States of the Union to assemble in the old hall of the House of Representatives the semblances of two of their chief citizens whom they deem most worthy of honor. The



place of assembly is noble in its proportions and will ever be sacred to patriot hearts for the memories it invokes. Its echoes sing of high hopes and great resolves as well as of palterings and compromises which put off the evil day only to find that respite had given longer time for the marshaling of greater forces for that greater struggle in which we bore a part.

Massachusetts will hold the place in reverence, for there one of the galaxy of her immortals, John Quincy Adams, fought his great fight and took his last stand in defense of those dumb, human cattle to pray for whom was then to give offense. Already, have been gathered there the contributions of many States. Some are worthy and will not depend for their future fame on the shelter which the roof of the Capitol gives to their more or less comely figures, though to use the expression of your living Senator, to whom the togas of Webster and Sumner seem none too large, uttered but a few days since, they may be "elbowed and surrounded by the temporarily notorious and the illustrious obscure." There has been recently placed there, as the contribution of his native State of Virginia, the bronze figure of Robert E. Lee, garbed in the uniform of a general in the Confederate Army. It has not yet met with formal acceptance from the Congress; no day has been set for eulogy. Some of the generation who knew him as the sword of the rebellion yet live. We are of that generation. The fires of passion, of resentment, and perhaps of revenge which march under the banners of war, though somewhat cooled by the chilling hand of age, still smoulder. The grandeur of our to-day sometimes points us backward and asks the question, and asks it over and over with persistent emphasis: *What would have been* had the belted warrior for whose figure Virginia craves the nation's sheltering hospitality, on some final battlefield received the sword of Grant in token of the death of the Union? It is no impeachment of that charity which "covereth a multitude of sins," nor of that magnanimity to the foe, exhibited by

soldier, citizen, State and nation when the Confederacy fell to rise no more, that here and there the citizen and the veteran have registered a protest. Is it wise or well that the protest, the little fire now kindled, be fanned into a flame? I think not.

The legislation under which the States were invited to occupy the dedicated chamber was approved July 2, 1864, now to be found in R. S. U. S., Sec. 1814. The pertinent language is: "And the President is authorized to invite all the States to provide and furnish statues in marble or bronze, not exceeding two in number for each State, of deceased persons who have been citizens thereof, and illustrious for their historic renown or for distinguished civic or military services, such as each State may deem to be worthy of this national commemoration."

It requires only a layman's wit to see that the question of the worthiness of the subject was left to the determination of the State. No censor on behalf of the United States was provided either as to character of the person figured or the work of the artist in delineating him. The door was opened; the States were invited to enter without other restriction upon their discretion than that the chosen should be "deceased" "who have been citizens thereof" and that the contribution should be of marble or bronze. It is true that, as a rule, as each State has installed its contribution there has been a formal resolution of acceptance passed by both Houses of Congress and a day set apart for eulogies. Rhode Island was first to respond to the national invitation with a statue of Nathaniel Green (January 20, 1870). On the occasion of its acceptance by resolution, the beloved Senator, Henry Wilson of Massachusetts, rising in his place, said: "The law as it now stands is complete in itself. I shall not oppose, however, the passage of this resolution as the matter has been inaugurated, and I hope as it has been introduced it will be put in proper form and passed. I repeat, however, the law in itself is complete and requires no legislation whatever, and I trust that hereafter it will be so regarded."

The State of New York in 1873 and 1874 placed in the National Statuary Hall, as her contribution, the statues of George Clinton and Robert R. Livingston. No action has been asked of or taken by Congress in the matter of these contributions, but they are as safely and lawfully there as they would be had formal resolution of acceptance been made of record. The statue of William Allen, one of the contributions of the State of Ohio, was placed in the Hall in 1888. No action has been taken by Senate or House. Since 1901 the statues of John E. Kenna and Francis H. Pierpont, the contribution of West Virginia, have had a place in the Hall, but no action by either House has been had. There are other cases in which but one House took action looking to acceptance. Pennsylvania presented the figures of her Muhlenberg and her Fulton in 1881. In 1889 these works were formally accepted by resolution of the House of Representatives, but no action was taken by the Senate.

When this great commonwealth set herself to the task of choosing, from the overflowing granary of her great dead, the meager two who should stand for her history and for her affections with the gathering few to be sheltered in the "Old Hall," she rightly determined that the selected ones should be "commemorative of *eras*" in her history; and so John Winthrop, twelve times Governor of the Colony (from 1630 to 1649), whose sway was under the British flag and whose allegiance was to the British crown so long as life lasted, was chosen; and it was a true instinct which set by his side "the fire-brand," the inciter of successful rebellion against the mother country whom all the world knows as Samuel Adams.

When the marble portraiture of these men had met with the approval of the appointed commission, *that commission*, as it duly reported to your Legislature, installed them in the places where they now stand; and, considering that their own powers were ended, requested the Massachusetts delegation in Congress "to call to the attention of that body the response of this State to its gracious invitation in such time and manner and with such formality as usage and propriety may seem to

you to require, and your own good taste and judgment may commend."

You will perceive that this had in it no thought of needed authority to enter the chamber nor of necessity for an act excusatory of an unauthorized intrusion. It called only for courteous notice to the Congress that Massachusetts had accepted the proffered hospitality of the law and desired the setting apart of a day in which to refresh the memories of the living by a recital of words and deeds of Winthrop and Adams, which should not be forgotten.

In the light of the law as it stands enacted, and of the act completed by the State of Virginia, duly taken by her lawfully constituted authorities, what may the Congress now do to mend or mar the situation? The authority of Congress over the Capitol is plenary. It may repeal the Act of 1864 which is unthinkable. It may amend the Act by constituting a commission of censors as to all future proffers of statues by the States, new or old, yet in arrears, which would be justly resented by the States; or it may register a protest against the future acceptance of the semblance of any man whose sword or energies were cast in the scale against the Union, and this would light again fires of passion, now well nigh extinguished, until our whole firmament would be aflame.

But why object to Lee at all. He is the second largest determining figure in a contest which history shall record as big with hopes and fears, which not only concerned us but concerned all civilized mankind. In that contest he was but the sword of John C. Calhoun and his like, who formed the plan of battle which Lee donned the uniform of the Confederacy to fight out. Calhoun is rightly there, as the senior Senator from Massachusetts has eloquently pointed out. I have never believed that the very heart of Lee was in the cause for which he fought. He was the victim of a *cult* which denied us a nation and ordered that supreme allegiance be given to the State. He followed the lead of South Carolina. He did not heed the voice of the great Virginian, John Marshall.

That chamber of the chosen of the States is history in the making, not a mere register of present day emotions; let it be truly balanced. Over against Calhoun and Lee will ever stand Morton and Phil Kearny; and Grant is near by. I would that John A. Andrew were there. Some day and somehow he must be gathered in.

Is the objection to Lee that he is there in the garb of a Confederate general? It lost its dangerous meaning at Appomattox. It marks him to-day as the fallen, and gives the luster of contrast to the uniformed soldiers of the Revolution and of the Rebellion, standing about him, whose garb bespeaks their devotion to the flag we love and the country they made and saved. And we may remember that when the prodigal returned he was clothed in the garments of his sin but was not refused admission to his father's house.

If there should ever come a day when the Nazarene shall so have triumphed that the nations in "one fold and under one shepherd" shall gather into a world's Pantheon the history-making men and women who have adorned or darkened the earth, a Pharaoh must envisage a Moses, a Mohammed a Constantine, the knightly Saladin stand face to face with Richard of the Lion Heart, Fabius would lack his emphasis did not Hannibal confront him; nor would the holy zeal of a Peter the Hermit find better background than those "scourges of God," Tamerlane and Gengis Khan. Surely, face to face with a Hildebrand should stand a Bruno and a Galileo. George Washington confronting George III will herald the birth of a nation whose immortal motto came to be "*of the people, for the people, and by the people.*"

Your senior Senator found just ground for commending the personal purity and mental integrity of the author and chief exponent of that political policy which, in its speaking mood, was called "State Rights," but which in its heart's concern sought the perpetuation and nationalization of the system of African slavery.

No word of just commendation affecting the personal qualities of Calhoun, the directing brain of the causes of the struggle, can be uttered, that is not true of Lee who carried

his sword. He was noble in form, gentle in word and act, calm in victory and in defeat, and both as man and soldier was the Bayard of his day—“*Sans peur et sans reproche.*” Since someone is to stand in that “*capitoline*” array so that, as history, the whole great tale may be figured and told, is there any other from among the Confederate hosts whose presence will so little challenge lingering resentments, or so amply illustrate the greatness of the task of those who successfully met and overcame rebellion on the battlefield? In presenting this statue garbed as it is there may be a little of bravado, but no matter that. We must allow our former foes to be human as well as ourselves. The impetus which inspired this action on the part of Virginia was not wholly her own. Behind it was the heart of that whole southland whose legions unfurled their banners under his leadership and furled them again only when he bowed his head at Appomattox. That they who presented him were not only moved by a loving regard for his person and memory which every generous heart must respect, but in large measure were impelled as well by the hope and perhaps belief that his and their lost cause might be somewhat commended to coming generations by his companionship with the “Father of his Country,” with whom he is associated in Virginia’s contribution to our National Pantheon. The coming ages will have none of this. When above the roar of the last battle the gentle words resounded over the land “Let us have peace,” the savagery of war forgot its passion for blood and every man saw in the beams of the setting sun a benediction for all. The pathos of the scene that followed has not its like in history. A disbanded host, which for four long years had defied the conscience of the world and boldly grappled with the civilization of an age, wended each his own way toward the spot where stood, or once had stood, the father’s house, trusting to the stranger for the charity of food and shelter by the way. There were tears of the heart for these. But for the cause, the cause that was lost? Beyond the limits of the Confederacy whose lines were blotted out that day no-

where where men live and pray to the "Our Father" of the Nazarene, whether on the mountains or in the valleys, by the rivers or on the seas, in the cottage or in the palace, did nature heave a sigh or man shed a tear that the land of Washington had been cleansed of its sin and that its noble phrases declaring the causes of its rebellion against the mother country were no longer a mockery. We did not fear the man; we need not fear his counterfeit presentment. His pedestal will be a shrine for a day of the remnant of those who bid him good-bye at Appomattox, but more and more as the years roll on he will symbolize the dying day and not the coming morning. No propaganda of evil will find strength in his name. It would not, if his lips could be unsealed. In a greater chamber near by, under the very dome of the Capitol, there stands a marble figure upon whose pedestal the badge of the Grand Army of the Republic is emblazoned. An open door gives exit and entrance between the chambers where stand, in the one, the chief figure of a beaten rebellion, in the other the laurel crowned chief of the Union hosts. *Grant keeps that door*, and it will please us who followed where he led, so long as our old eyes are unclosed, to dream at least that the thousands of our comrades who sleep with him still rally to his standard.

I read the other day that, in a State that shall not be named, a picture of Abraham Lincoln was found hanging on a school-room wall; that its patrons demanded its removal and denounced the authors of the indignity. That example does not appeal to us. History with imperious voice demands silence, when personal passion, aims, and purposes obtrude themselves upon the scene. It concerns itself with events, with results, and calls the chief actors in them to the witness stand. So long as the written page exists, the names of Grant and Lee will be coupled together; so long as a sheltering roof remains upon the Capitol at Washington the thronging feet of the generations will pause awhile to exalt the leader of the armies of Liberty and Union and to mark the image of him—the last of civilized men—who led an army in defense of the right to chattelize mankind.

But whilst we thus characterize the leaders of the rebellion and their cause (and only because of it) in words which, though true to the history we know and to the times in which we live, may seem drawn from a well of bitter waters, let us not too much "boast ourselves." There are many pages in the histories of the non-slave-holding States, and among them of Massachusetts, which in this behalf record events we should be glad to forget.

Even the spirit and purposes of those acts of southern legislatures which to-day encourage the enslavement of the mind and the belittling of the soul of the black race by discriminations in the award of public rights, have their prototypes in Massachusetts laws. A citizen of Boston—a man of pure life and lofty ideals—who pronounced the doom and happily lived to see the death of slavery, was dragged through her streets with a rope around his neck. He dared to be an echo of Heaven's hate, of the oppressors of the poor. He did not heed the clinking at the mouths of the money bags of Beacon Street. Before Garrison delivered his message, Rev. John Weiss, of Watertown, speaking for the few who then openly expressed their detestation of the "peculiar institution," truly said: "Our northern apathy" (and he might have added "sympathy") "heated the iron, forged the manacles, and built the pillory."

Until almost the moment when the blind Samson, standing between the pillars of our then slavery ruled temple, bowed himself to his mighty task and it fell, we of the North were of "the jeering multitude, who scoffed at his rights, mocked his apparent helplessness, and sported with his bonds." So said Salmon P. Chase, as he stood before a United States judge pleading for one accused of the crime of helping a man to freedom. Take down your copy of Henry Wilson's "Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America" and see the lineaments of "Northern Apologists for Southern Rights," and learn to be modest in your judgments of their partners in the sin we so much deplore.

Who of Boston's older people do not recall the fugi-

tives George Latimer and Anthony Burns and remember how the noble few then bowed their heads in shame while the many, to give them undue flattery, "passed by on the other side."

I have seen in Boston a building you call the "Old State House." It stands in the midst of the rush and roar of the city's expanding commerce. It obstructs the widening of the passing streets. The hungry eyes of the builder are upon it. The municipality in its improving moods would fain have it out of the way, but against every lifting of an unfriendly hand the chorus from the throat of all has been

"Woodman, spare that tree."

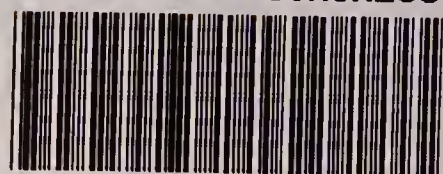
It speaks of colonial days; of allegiance to the mother country. Upon its front still stand *the Lion and the Unicorn*, the emblems of that British power under which, near by, the anointing blood of the final victory of the colonies was shed. Not the mere uniform of an English general is there, but the escutcheon, the coat of arms, the emblazenment of the might which sought to stay the rising purposes which have their fulfilment in our own to-day. What better balance for Bunker Hill does Boston boast than the captive lion and unicorn?

Dear Jack Adams, your own Jack Adams—peace to his ashes!—said here in Boston: "Men are often greater in what they refrain from doing than in what they do."

There are no cloudless days this side the veil; somewhere the sun is hidden.

I grant you that it might seem to us to have been more gracious in Virginia to have clothed her great son in the cap and gown of that noble vocation which had his glad service in his declining years. But that would have been to salute the dying of to-day and to have robbed history of her lesson and her truth.

The altar on which our comrades shed their blood is now as wide as the continent. One people hear the salute to the flag we love at the sun's rising; they hear it again with glad-



ness at her setting. I remind you once more that to-morrow is history. If our opponents, who in the day of their madness sought an end of the Republic, so choose—and so they have chosen—to give to him portraiture in the garb of the prisoner of war he was when he last donned it as a living emblem of authority, we may well silence emotions which are of a day. Coming generations will know its import and, gazing on it, will bless the hour when it ceased to have other significance than the reminder of a time when the premier nation, born under Washington's sword, reached its manhood with the surrender of that of Robert E. Lee.

Comrades of Massachusetts, I have been with you before; then, as now, have partaken of your boundless hospitality, and rejoiced in your affectionate greetings. I would that if but a little of the seed of the race could be spared from the common lot of man that some of you should be the chosen ones.

I know how you have honored your comrades dead, and how you care for the living. How with jealous care, under your promptings, it has been seen to that no pauper role shall have on it the name of a soldier of the Union; and that no administrator of public charities shall give the dole; that because you are becoming few, the remnant shall not have less honor than had the many.

The beloved comrade who for so long has dispensed the willing bounty of the State sits with us to-night. The Grand Army of the Republic as well as his State is his debtor for services faithfully rendered for many years. I hope that the time is ripe when, in recognition of his services, his sacrifices and his worth, he may be called to adorn the highest place in the gift of the Grand Army of the Republic.

Comrades, for to-night I give you my *hail!* and my *farewell!* We do not know of the morrow; but whatever betide there is a glorious company whose familiar names are fresh in memory, who once cheered us here, who are waiting us who now “only wait.”